

# COVID-19 DECISION-MAKING GUIDE

MARCH 22 UPDATE



Lethbridge  
SCHOOL DIVISION

The following information is designed to provide the public with a greater understanding of the process the Lethbridge School Division Board of Trustees and central administration use to determine if the Division can ease COVID-19 protocols in schools.

As always, the overriding principle is the safety of students, staff, the school community and the larger community.

Each month, the Board considers information in the following categories:

## CATEGORY 1: GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

**Has Alberta Health Services provided any new direction or guidance?**

- Currently there are 966 hospitalizations (62 in ICU), with a positivity rate of 21%. Since testing and identification of COVID-19 has moved to higher risk populations we have not received the same level of support to identify COVID-19 in our schools. Stages for lifting of provincial protocols were announced Feb. 8. Stage 1: Removal of the Restrictions Exemption Program (REP) was lifted effective Feb 9, 2022, the removal of masking requirements for students grades K-12 effective February 14, and the removal of indoor masking for all was implemented on March 1, 2022.

**Has Alberta Education provided any new direction or guidance?**

- Public Health Measures were eased in 3 steps. Step 2 began on March 1, 2022. For schools, this includes these changes:
  - The provincial masking mandate is removed. Staff and students can continue to wear masks if they choose to. Schools should support students and staff who choose to wear masks.
  - Remaining provincial school requirements (including cohorting) are removed.
  - Screening prior to youth activities is no longer required.
- The school shift process for provincial school authorities remains.
  - School authorities have the discretion to shift a grade or class to at-home learning should it be operationally required.
  - Shifts for schools or entire school authorities for operational reasons require minister approval.
- Mandatory isolation requirements have not changed. These requirements will be removed in Step 3 of the phased approach and will become a recommendation at that time.

**Has OH&S provided any new direction or guidance?**

- As of Feb. 17, 2022, the following were no longer in effect: Procedure 700.3.2 Workplace Health and Safety: Hazard Control Employee COVID-19 Vaccine Status Procedure and Procedure 700.3.3 Workplace Health and Safety: Hazard Control Substitute and Casual Personnel COVID-19 Vaccine Status Procedure.

**Other guidelines (ASAA for example) - Currently unchanged as of Feb. 14, 2022**

- In school sport practices and inter-school games can occur. All sport competitions are operating.
- REP no longer in place

## CATEGORY 2: COVID-19 CASES IN LETHBRIDGE

**How many active cases are there in Lethbridge?**

- Active case counts in Lethbridge.
  - Trend in Lethbridge: Feb. 21 (205); March 21 (502); April 18 (462); May 24 (201); Sept. 27 (451); Oct. 29 (282); Nov. 19 (139); Dec. 10 (84); Jan. 21 (1,305); Feb. 11 (798), March 18 (292)

## CATEGORY 3: COVID-19 CASES IN SCHOOLS

**Are there known COVID-19 diagnosis in any schools?**

- AHS is no longer conducting contact tracing or reporting positive cases within schools as of early January. Students and staff are to utilize the AHS Daily Checklist to determine the course of action for their situation.

**Has AHS mandated that staff in any school isolate due to possible exposure at school?**

- AHS is no longer conducting contact tracing or reporting positive cases within schools as of early January.
- Close contacts are recommended to rapid test and monitor for possible symptoms our schools follow the AHS daily checklist.

**Has AHS mandated that students isolate in any school?**

- Only positive cases are required to stay home. Staff and students are all encouraged to stay home if they are symptomatic (sick).

**Is AHS conducting contract tracing in any schools?**

- AHS is no longer conducting contact tracing or reporting positive cases within schools as of early January.

**Is there evidence of COVID-19 transmission within schools?**

- AHS no longer provides contact tracing to determine if COVID is being transmitted at school.

## CATEGORY 4: ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS AND LEARNING

**Insurance – has our insurer given any specific guidelines and/or restrictions that affect the division’s position of potential liability?**

- Insurer recommendations for vaccination procedures and restriction programs has been lifted..

**How does the student absenteeism rate compare to a non-COVID year?**

- The absenteeism is higher than a non-COVID year. The absenteeism rates are on par with 2020-21 absenteeism. The rates are still double what they were in 2018-19 (non-covid year). Fridays continue to be the days that present with higher absenteeism rates. Males tend to be more absent than females.

**How does the staff absenteeism rate compare to a non-COVID year; is it impacting instruction?**

- March - (until March 14) - decrease of -8.10 absences per day for illness or COVID symptoms compared to March 2021.

**Overall, have schools communicated that they support change and have the capacity to assume the additional responsibilities that come with co- and extra-curricular activities?**

- History:
- Secondary Administrators recognize that the primary consideration and focus in extra-curricular pursuits is student participation, as well as health and well-being of students and the school community. The Restrictions Exemption Program was initiated in September for outdoor sport. Application of the restriction exemption program subsequently moved to indoor sport at the secondary level with strategies specific to the sport or activity developed by schools. Specific strategies started with restricting the number of spectators for each participant (two spectators/ participant). In December, schools moved to other strategies for some seasonal events such as one-third capacity of the building to increase the number of spectators per participant. Following Winter break and the sudden spike in cases, secondary school administrators decided to restrict inter-school activity and spectators (Jan. 10 – 16). Inter-school activity was re-instated the week of January 17. Competitive games and tournaments were permitted. Following the government announcement February 9, 2022 with “Stages” of protocol withdrawal, Stage 1 lifted REP and facility capacity restrictions. Masks for all spectators was removed when the province moved to stage Stage 2. The REP applied to co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and placed limits on audience members for performances and spectators for sports. The REP was lifted by the Alberta government and as of Wednesday, February 9, 2022, people attending events inside our schools no longer need to provide proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test

## CATEGORY 5: OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

**What is the Standard of Care owed to students and staff?**

- Guided by MOH, wellness standards, OHS, impact on capacity to maintain Standard of Care required during the pandemic

**Political Pressure/Parent Pressure considerations**

- Supporting learning environments to be respectful of masking choice
- Supporting parent and outside community involvement while maintaining safety within the school

**Are there other factors to consider?**

- Lethbridge vaccination rates for school aged children (2 doses) – March 17:
  - West Lethbridge – 5-11 = 37.8% / 12-19 = 90.5%
  - North Lethbridge - 5 – 11 = 24.4% / 12-19 = 82.5%
  - South Lethbridge - 5 – 11 = 28% / 12 – 19 = 86.8%

## SUMMARY QUESTIONS

**Are there changes from Alberta Health Services, Alberta Education or OH&S that would suggest we need to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?**

- Changes have been implemented as they arise (e.g. removal of masking). Contact notification is no longer in place.

**Does community transmission information suggest we need to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?**

- We do not current have available data to determine community transmission.

**Does school COVID-19 information suggest we need to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?**

- Current COVID-19 school data is not available.

**Does organizational status information suggest we need to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?**

- Our COVID-19 numbers have been decreasing steadily for two months as we approach the end of the fourth wave.

**Are there other factors we need to consider when deciding if we should maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?**

- Substitute staff also can get sick and this can impact our ability to staff.